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NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTERING IN PORTO RICO

WOMAN'S BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

New York, N. Y.

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
No. 551-12-15 425 LOMBARD STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19147

NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTERING IN PORTO RICO

I FOUND a typical mission school at Aguadilla where we have five grades. The surrounding community from which our school draws is in a deplorable condition, evidently in need of almost everything that makes life worth living. I cannot imagine a more discouraging or disheartening environment for children than that of the Pueblo Nuevo Marina section in Aguadilla. Just why these conditions persist on an island where so much has been done for sanitation, I cannot understand. It seems that these poor people were given the privilege of settling on this tract, which was purchased by the Masons, after the hurricane. For filth and local misery I can hardly conceive of worse conditions. And yet from these homes, the children come into the little Pueblo Nuevo school more or less tidily dressed, more or less washed and clean, showing that even here the Porto-Rican desire for display in public is not wanting.

That it is the duty of our Church to make some attack on this deplorable condition is unquestioned. Ours is the only Protestant Church in that field, and we must demonstrate that, if the Catholics can be indifferent to such horrible social conditions, Protestantism cannot. I am convinced that the mission day school is not, however, the proper method of attack; that only a neighborhood settlement with (1) a visiting nurse working in cooperation with the local physician, (2) day nursery for the mothers, (3) a play school for the little children below public school age, (4) profitable industrial work, and (5) competent instruction in domestic science will achieve the desired end.

Miss Sloan is doing her usual heroic work in endeavoring to meet the needs of all who are not in the public school. She is ably assisted by Miss Thompson, the primary and kindergarten teacher, by Miss Santiago, one of the graduates of the Colegio, and Laura Jacob, the young negro girl who has labored here so effectively for several years.

I had hardly gotten settled in Miss Hazen's attractive quarters before suggestions were being poured into my ears as to enlargements, both in the building and along the line of equipment.

I have no question, however, in recommending that this work be increased in scope and intensified in activity in any way that may be feasible. I cannot praise too highly the splendid results which this little woman has accomplished in community regeneration. It may truly be called "settlement work." Miss Hazen has settled among the people, has become part and parcel of the community and her influence is everywhere prevalent.

As the educational needs at Anasco and San German are so well supplied by the public schools the Board is planning to discontinue its work at these stations.

As the Colegio Americano building has not proved a satisfactory site for the settlement work which was instituted when the school was closed last June, and as furthermore, the needs of the Marina Settlement are still beyond our ability to supply, it has been decided to discontinue the Colegio work and concentrate our resources in the development of the Marina Mission.